Harold Francis Branch

The Trial of Jesus

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By HAROLD FRANCIS BRANCH

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HAROLD FRANCIS BRANCH

PREFACE

THERE are on the market a number of books dealing with the trial of Christ in a very detailed and often somewhat involved way. Most of these are so technical and labored in their treatment of the subject as to be of small value to the ordinary reader.

The author became interested in the study of the trial of Christ early in his seminary course. He did special and independent research work in connection with the topic during the entire period of his stay in the seminary. Having long felt the need of a treatment of the trial of Christ which would more nearly meet the requirements of the average busy, uncritical, earnest Christian reader, he has attempted to produce such a booklet.

There are many who have a somewhat general idea of the trial of Jesus but there are few who have a clear idea of the events in their sequence. It is of value to have a concatenated view of this, the most famous and the most vital of all trials in the history of criminal law. The following pages contain, therefore, the story, hour by hour, of this most interesting trial.

The book is brief. None of the scholarly and critical questions are entered upon. The author has sought to present the scene at each point in the trial in such a vivid, accurate and devotional way that the reader will feel as though he were actually witnessing the progress, step by step, of this trial of the Son of God.

While, as has been said, the work is not designed to be critical, no time nor labor was spared in an effort to make it absolutely accurate as regards the sequence of events mentioned.

It is the prayer of the author, as he sends out this child of his heart and mind, that, under God's grace, it may be a blessing to the hearts of men and bring many to love and to accept Him, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

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THE TRIAL OF JESUS

WE are to discuss the most famous trial in the history of criminal law. The question before us is, whether Jesus of Nazareth was duly tried and executed for breaking the law, or was murdered under the pretense of legal process.

One's faith in Christianity is in no way involved in this inquiry. Jesus Christ came into the world with a definite mission. That mission may have involved violations rather than observances of the Jewish law as then known by Rabbinical traditions. He may have been regularly tried, convicted and condemned to death without casting a doubt upon His accepted mission. Christianity rests upon a firmer basis than the mistakes of the Jews!

All are very familiar with the events immediately preceding His death, but a brief review is necessary to a correct understanding of His trial.

Tuesday afternoon (April 4, A. D. 30) * He left the temple at Jerusalem the last time. With His followers He went to the slope of the Mount of Olives and prophesied that within two days He would be delivered up to His enemies and crucified.

* Scholars agree that it is practically impossible to fix the chronology of the life of Christ with any great degree of accuracy. It is generally conceded by men of letters that Christ was born in the early part of the year 4 B. C. The year 30 A. D. is fixed, with a somewhat less degree of certainty, as the date of the Crucifixion. Much depends upon whether one accepts the tripaschal or the quadripaschal theory as to the length of His public ministry. Scholars are greatly divided here. According to the first named theory—the tripaschal—there were three Passovers in the course of Christ's ministry. According to the quadripaschal theory there were four Passovers during that time. The writer accepts the latter named theory and the dates herein contained are on that basis.

What a day it had been! It has gone down in Christian history as "The Day of Controversy." Early in the morning, as He had come into the temple the Priests and the Elders had come to Him, asking by what authority He did these things, thus seeking to discredit Him. He had responded by a question which as we know, His questioners *dared* not answer!—"The baptism of John, whence was it?" (Matt. 21:23-27.) It was a masterpiece of dialectic on the part of Jesus and, while His critics were still wincing at the home thrust, He pursued them with three parables of warning (Matt. 21:28—22:14). Then, as the Priests and Elders turned away, Jesus continued to teach the multitude, but He was not to be left in peace. The Pharisees had noted the discomfiture of the Priests and the Elders and now determined to try their hand at the game of discrediting Jesus. They approach with a question evincing no less skill than villainy: "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar?" (Matt. 22:17-22.) While it seemed a clever *question* it was a clever *trick* and, seeing the plot laid for Him, Jesus turns on them denouncing their hypocrisy, and in a few minutes strips the mask from their faces and sends them slinking away.

Presently He was approached by another group—the Sadducees. They had hugely enjoyed the way in which the Pharisees, who were their theological enemies, had met defeat and confusion at the hands of the Master, and now they come with a pretentious air confident of their superiority. The question which they propound to Him has to do with the resurrection and was utterly ridiculous. According to all Jewish

thought this woman who had had seven husbands would always be considered the wife of the first husband. The Sadducees knew this perfectly well. Jesus might well have brushed their question aside, answering levity with scorn; however, He replies reprovingly, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Matt. 22: 23-33).

The Lord's adversaries had been worsted in each attempt and had they been wise, would have acknowledged their defeat and troubled Him no more. But the Pharisees, exulting in the discomfiture of the Sadducees, determined to make one more effort. They accordingly appointed one of their number to ask Him what was the greatest commandment in the law—a question of endless dispute in their own theological controversies. "The first and greatest," answered Jesus, "is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength.' Second this: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Greater than these is no commandment. On these two commandments the whole law hangs and the prophets.' " "Of a truth, Teacher," the questioner cried, "Thou hast well said. To love one's neighbor as one's self is exceeding more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Matt. 22:34-40). Then comes one of those beautiful little touches that show the tenderness of the Master in such a vivid way. Moved by the wistfulness of the man's reply, Jesus said, looking on him kindly, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). One cannot help but wonder what became of that scribe! Did

he obey the gracious invitation and take the decisive step?

The long controversy, so skillfully conducted, so persistently renewed, is ended, and Jesus stands victorious. "No man dared to interrogate Him any more" (Matt. 22:46), and so as evening approached He withdrew to the house of Simon, whom He had cured of leprosy, and where a supper had been prepared for Him. This happy supper with those whom He has blessed, marks the beginning of those events which lead to His crucifixion. Judas here heard Jesus repeat over and over again that He was soon to be delivered to His enemies and crucified. This worldly man, Judas, had hoped that Jesus was to be King of the Jews in a political sense and that hope had fathered an ambition to be one of the select few who should govern in Judea. But now, without any of these great fruits having been realized, Jesus announces that He is about to die, and Judas, seeing that his ambitions for political betterment are doomed to disappointment, resolves to desert the unpopular cause and seek refuge in the camp of the enemy. This he does, and stealing out, makes his way to the temple. There he arouses the sleeping guards and says, "I have come to betray Jesus of Nazareth." Thus he bargains with the priests to deliver up his Master for thirty pieces of silver—$18.50—the price of a slave! (Exodus 21:32.)

Wednesday passed and Thursday night Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in that upper room in Jerusalem. Here too was Judas whom Christ knew had agreed to betray Him. Jesus announces the betrayal in the unique way well known and, leaving the upper

room, He and His disciples make their way to the Mount of Olives. There He bade them farewell for the last time and withdrew to the Garden of Gethsemane. Meanwhile, at the temple, Judas and the Priests have finished plans for the betrayal. In the Garden, Jesus is taken into custody and, while Jerusalem is asleep, He is led by the guard before the Great Sanhedrin for trial.

Let us diverge for a moment and consider the court before which He was brought for trial.

We have nothing that compares with the Jewish Sanhedrin. Its functions were political, legislative, judicial, municipal, religious and educational. In other words, if you could imagine a body which had many of the duties of our legislatures, judges, juries, city councils, township boards and school boards, you would have some idea of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

There were three Sanhedrins—the Local Sanhedrins, the Provincial Sanhedrins, and the Great Sanhedrin which sat at Jerusalem. It was the Great Sanhedrin before which Jesus was brought. It was a body of seventy-one members.

Members of the Sanhedrin were required to have seven qualifications—wisdom, gentleness, soberness, piety, hatred of mammon, love for the truth, and to be men of good repute. They were not allowed to seek office. One who secured his seat in the body through having sought it was despised by his associates.

Such were the principles which originally governed the consistency of the Jewish Sanhedrins, but the court had decayed with the Jewish law and now was little more than a legal monstrosity. One writer on the sub-

ject has put it this way—"The law of Moses had, for fifteen hundred years before Christ, flowed from Mount Sinai as clear and as pure as the head waters of the Mississippi; meandered through two centuries; been lost in the wilderness; carried captive to Babylon; returned to Judea; corrupted by Persian idolatry, then by Grecian Polytheism and Egyptian Pantheism, and worse than all, the Rabbis, the nurses of the law, had so clouded it by casuistry and vain speculation, that on the coming of Christ, the generally accepted law of Moses was as dark and unhealthful as are the waters of the deltas of Louisiana, into which has been dumped the refuse of a thousand cities."

The court before which Jesus was tried was a corrupt court. Many of its members held their positions by purchase. The ideal system of selecting judges, to which we have just now called your attention, was not then observed. For a series of years during the decline of the Jewish Commonwealth, the worst men of the community sought and obtained judicial preferment. Judea was passing through a period of great political and religious excitement. At such a time in any state, the scum of society is stirred up and usually possesses the surface of the troubled waters. And then this court was prejudiced against Jesus. He had been condemned to death before He was tried! During the few months preceding this Thursday night the Sanhedrin had met three times to discuss the teachings of Jesus. At the first meeting a decree of excommunication had been passed, not only upon Jesus, but upon all who should believe on Him (John 9:22). The Sanhedrin alone had the power

to excommunicate and it exercised this power in spite of the somewhat feeble protest of Nicodemus, who was one of their number (John 7:37-53). At the two meetings which followed (John 11:46-57 and Matt. 26:3-5 and Luke 22:1-3) Jesus was tried, condemned and sentenced to death without having ever been present or having been given a hearing. All of this was in violation of the Jewish law as given in the Talmud—"Testimony shall not be heard in the absence of the party accused," and "No man shall be condemned unless he is present" (*Mishna,* Sanhedrin, Ch. IV, 6).

Before inquiring into the several steps taken in the trial let us ask this question: From what we know of the life of Jesus, had He violated the law of the Jewish state so that He was guilty of an offense punishable by death? The question is easily answered and the answer does not weaken any intelligent faith in orthodox Christianity! Jesus had ignored the traditions of the fathers. He had broken the traditional or rabbinical Sabbath (Matt. 12:10-14). He had called the Scribes and Priests a wicked and adulterous generation—a generation of vipers! (Matt. 12:34). He said He was the Messiah (John 4:26). He had prophesied the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:1-2). He said He was the Son of God (John 9:35-37). He had sought to bring home to them the Spirit of the law—fulfilling it as He said (Matt. 5:17); pouring into it new and richer content. The words "ye have heard it hath been said by them of old time * * * but I say unto you" were on His lips again and again. All of these things He had done *because* He had come into the world with a definite mission—the fulfilment

of a *higher* law than any known to Jewish jurispru dence.

The trial was in two distinct parts, or rather, in th form of two separate and distinct trials. The firs was the Jewish, or ecclesiastical trial; and the second the Roman, or civil trial. The first was conducted be fore Caiaphas, Annas, and the Sanhedrin; and the sec ond before Pilate and Herod Antipas.

Let us first consider the trial before Caiaphas an the Sanhedrin. Upon what charge was this ma brought before the court to be tried in the middle o the night? Was it blasphemy, false prophecy, or Sab bath-breaking? The record points sometimes to on and sometimes to another charge. The real charge evidently, was sedition and blasphemy. Jesus stood before the court and was questioned by the High Pries Caiaphas. His answers and His silence were alike un satisfactory. Witnesses were called in, but their state ments did not agree. At last, Caiaphas, in exasperation, rose from his couch and cried, "Art thou the Son of God?" Jesus answered, "You have said it. I am." "What need is there of more witnesses?" cried the High Priest, "He has blasphemed," and, says the record, "Caiaphas rent his clothing" (Matt. 26:62ff.).

The vote of the court was taken and Jesus was condemned to death *unanimously* (Matt. 26:66). This session of the court was held about three o'clock in the morning of Friday, the Festal day. The court adjourned for a few hours' rest and Jesus was given over to the guards, who inflicted upon Him a series of repulsive indignities. They blindfolded Him and spat in His face, and then told Him to prophesy who

it was who did it (Matt. 26:67, 68). This affliction was of short duration, however, for the Priests arose after a brief sleep to meet the more notable men of the priesthood that the sentence just pronounced might be ratified. This was a mere matter of form and hastily disposed of in order that Jesus might be placed under the guard of the Roman authorities before His followers should rescue Him.

The Jewish court, or the Sanhedrin, had authority to try capital cases under their own law. In case of an acquittal of the accused, the matter was ended without Roman interference; but in case of a conviction, the Roman Governor was required to review the case and confirm or reverse the decision. This provision was, to the Jews, a galling reminder of their subjection to Rome! Thus ends the Hebrew trial. Jesus is condemned. Let us now examine the Jewish law in search of errors.

ERRORS IN THE TRIAL OF JESUS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF JEWISH LAW

FIRST ERROR

The ARREST *of Jesus was illegal.*

a. 1. Because no legal business could be conducted after the sun went down (*Mishna*, Sanhedrin, ch. IV, 1).

2. Because effected through the agency of a traitor and informer in violation of the Mosaic code and a Rabbinic rule based thereon. (Lev. 19:17, 18).

a. Chandler's *Trial of Jesus*, p. 255.

3. Because it was not the result of a legal mandate of a court whose intentions were to conduct a legal trial for the purpose of reaching a righteous judgment.

SECOND ERROR

The EXAMINATION *before Annas and Caiaphas was illegal.*

b. 1. Because it was conducted at night (*Mishna,* Sanhedrin, ch. IV, 1).

2. Because Annas and Caiaphas sat alone in each case, in direct violation of a Hebrew law which provided that no judge, sitting alone, could interrogate an accused person or sit in judgment upon his legal rights (Deut. 19:16-18. The plural form of the word "judge" is significant here).

3. Because Caiaphas seeks to make Jesus incriminate Himself in direct violation of Hebrew law (*Mishna,* Sanhedrin, ch. II, 4). (Matt. 26:63.)

4. Because the trial was opened with no previously prepared bill of indictments against the prisoner—a provision necessary to legalize the proceedings of every court of justice, the Sanhedrin itself evidently originating the charges, while as Edersheim says, "The Sanhedrin did not and could not originate charges, it only investigated those brought before it." (Edersheim's *Life and Times of Jesus,* p. 309, Vol. I.)

b. Chandler's *Trial of Jesus,* p. 219.

5. Because Caiaphas began the examination with a captious question (John 18:19), disregarding the law of witnesses (Deut. 17:2-6).

THIRD ERROR

The INDICTMENT *against Jesus was illegal.*

1. Because it was vague, two-fold, and indefinite (Mark 14: 57ff.; Deut. 19:15).
2. Because it was made, in part, by Caiaphas, while Hebrew law permitted none but the leading witnesses to present the charge (Deut. 17:6).
3. Because Caiaphas was abusive toward Jesus in his manner of conducting the hearing. The expressions used by the judge to the accused were to be humane and even kind (*Mishna*, Sotah, ch. I, 4). (For an example of this carried out in practice, see Joshua 7:19.)
4. Because the charge was presented by two witnesses who testified simultaneously—flagrant violation of all law and custom. (Witnesses were to give their testimony separately. See Daniel: Apocrypha—Daniel and the two Elders.)

FOURTH ERROR

The PROCEEDINGS *against Jesus were illegal.*

1. Because the integrity of the witnesses was not established before their testimony was heard. All witnesses were to be duly put on oath before testifying (Deut. 19:18, 19).

2. Because the witnesses, though known to be false (Matt. 26:59-60; Mark 14:55), were not punished as provided for in Mosaic law (Deut. 19:18-21).

3. Because Jesus was struck in the mouth. This disgusting act of brutality reflects on the sense of justice and the humanity of the judges. It is a fundamental axiom of Hebrew law, as of all law, save the Roman, that a prisoner is considered innocent until proven guilty.

a. 4. Because the trial was begun and concluded within one day—a flagrant violation of Hebrew law (*Mishna*, Sanhedrin, ch. IV. 1). If a man were convicted on a capital charge no judgment could be pronounced until the afternoon of the following day. One night must intervene between the verdict and the sentence. In the meantime the judges partook of no food. Early the next morning they again assembled and heard the witnesses of the accused. As the day wore away they discussed and pondered over the serious character of their duty and their great responsibility. Late in the afternoon they took their final vote. If the required number again voted to convict, the accused was at once sentenced and led forth to execution. Was Jesus tried in this way? He was not!

5. Because the trial was held at night, in direct violation of Hebrew law (*Mishna*, Sanhedrin, ch. IV, 1).

a. Chandler's *Trial of Jesus*, p. 267.

We have seen that Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane about midnight and that His first ecclesiastical trial took place about two or three o'clock in the morning. Luke tells us that there was a daybreak meeting which was evidently intended to give a semblance of legality and regularity to the affair since, as we have seen, the law required two trials of the case.

The exact time of the beginning of the night session of the Sanhedrin is not known. It is generally supposed that the arrest took place in the Garden between midnight and one o'clock. The question has been frequently asked: "Why did the Sanhedrin meet at night, thus violating the law?" The answer is referable to the treachery of Judas, and to the fact that "he sought opportunity to betray Him unto them, in the absence of the multitude." Luke tells us that the members of the Sanhedrin "feared the people" (Luke 22:2). Mark informs us that they had decided not to attempt the arrest and execution of Jesus at the time of the Passover, "lest there be an uproar of the people" (Mark 14:2).

FIFTH ERROR

The CONDEMNATION *of Jesus was illegal.*

1. Because the verdict of the Sanhedrin was unanimous for His death (Mark 14:64). This fact marks a peculiar point of difference between our law and the Jewish jurisprudence.

In our courts a man who is condemned unanimously is thought guilty indeed. It was not so in the Hebrew courts. There the judges were expected to be the defenders of the accused, and if the vote of condemnation was unanimous, it was taken for granted that the judges had failed in their duty as defenders and the accused was at once released.

a. 2. Because Christ's condemnation was founded upon His uncorroborated confession. Jesus was compelled by the High Priest to be witness against Himself. Caiaphas said to Jesus "I adjure Thee by the Living God, to tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of the Living God." The court had no right to ask that question. He should not have been called upon to incriminate Himself. The answer came, "I am." Upon His own testimony Jesus was convicted and condemned, and all this in spite of the fundamental maxim of Jewish jurisprudence: "No man convicts himself" (*Maimonides,* Sanhedrin, ch. IV, 2) and "at the mouth of two or more witnesses let it be established" (Deut. 19:15).

b. 3. Because sentence was passed in a place forbidden by Jewish law. Jesus was tried for a capital offense in the palace of the High Priest, while Jewish law declared that all such trials were to be heard in the hall of hewn stone within the temple.

a. Chandler's *Trial of Jesus,* p. 271.
b. Chandler's *Trial of Jesus,* p. 287.

b. 4. Because the High Priest rent his clothing in disregard of Jewish law (Lev. 21:10; 10:6).

c. 5. Because the session of court at which Jesus was condemned was held before the offering of the morning sacrifice (*Talmud Bab.*, Sanhedrin, ch. I, 19). "Since the morning sacrifice was offered at dawn of day it was hardly possible for the Sanhedrin to assemble before an hour after that time" (Magath's *Jesus Before the Sanhedrin*, p. 109).

6. Because the balloting was irregular. The members of the Sanhedrin, in case of a trial for a capital offense were required to vote in turn, beginning with the younger (this provision wisely made in order that the vote of the younger man might not be affected by the vote of the older), and each was to say in answer to the call of his name: "I absolve," or "I condemn." In the case of Christ they all cried out their condemnation at once! (Matt. 26:66.)

a. 7. Because the defense was not heard. There were to be two parts to every trial—the accusation and the defense (*Mishna*, Sanhedrin, ch. IV, 5); (Deut. 13:14). There was in the trial of Christ no pretense of a defense.

8. Because the testimony of the two witnesses, false as they were, did not agree (Matt. 14:56; 26:60), and in accordance with the law Christ should have been at once released

a. Chandler's *Trial of Jesus*, p. 287.
b. Chandler's *Trial of Jesus*, p. 260.
c. Chandler's *Trial of Jesus*, p. 309.

and the false witnesses slain (Deut. 19:18-21).

9. Because the witnesses distorted Christ' words. He did not say, "I *will destroy*," o "I *can destroy*," but said simply, "*Destroy* (John 2:19-21). They accused Him of say ing, "I am able to destroy" (Matt. 26:60, 61)

So much for the Hebrew trial! Fraudulent through out! Now, what of the Roman trial?

They immediately, and in the early hours of Frida morning, took Jesus before Pontius Pilate, the Roma Procurator. This sovereign was in his house in th northeast corner of the city near the Temple of An tonia. The punctilious Jews approached the hous but remained on the steps, not daring to go in, becau it was the Passover season and they would have bee "defiled" had they entered the house of a Gentile. is one of the ironies of history that men so fearful ceremonial defilement, should think nothing of layi murderous hands upon God's Son! Pilate, in respon to their clamour, appeared on the steps. As he glar at this mob which had disturbed his early morni meditations—for these Roman Governors were r early risers—one can well imagine the contempt wi which he surveyed them! Fixing his eye upon t leaders, he demanded, "What accusation bring y against this man?" Caiaphas, at that moment, co think of none and answered, "If he were not a ma factor, we would not have delivered Him unto you "Take ye Him and judge Him according to your law (John 18:31), said Pilate, contemptuously. Th

however, would not serve the purpose of the accusers, and they raised a clamour, whereupon Pilate insisted upon knowing the exact charge.

The priests were hard "put to"! It would not do to say that Jesus was a blasphemer. Pilate would have snapped his fingers at such a charge! What cared he for blasphemy? And yet *blasphemy* was the charge upon which Jesus had been *condemned* by the *Sanhedrin*. All the cunning of the Priests was demanded by this emergency. They must accuse Jesus of some political offense over which Pilate would assume jurisdiction. "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he is Christ, a King" (Luke 23:2), said Caiaphas. It was a deliberate lie. At no time had Jesus forbidden to pay tribute to Cæsar. To the contrary, He had explicitly told them to render to Cæsar the things which were Cæsar's. The charge, however, had to be made, else Pilate would not take charge of the case.

Jesus therefore stood before the Roman Governor charged, not with blasphemy, but with treason against the Roman state! How Pilate must have enjoyed the situation! These Jews so worried about paying tribute to Cæsar! They had always been *so eager* to pay that tribute! How zealous they had suddenly become in caring for the safety of the Roman state and for her revenue! The Priests knew that the charge was a mere pretense, but the pretense had to be made or Pilate would not assume jurisdiction over the case.

The charges of high treason and of sedition against Jesus were all the more serious because the Romans believed Palestine to be a hotbed of insurrection and

sedition. Pilate was, therefore, interested at once wh
he heard this charge. "If," Pilate must have said, "t
fellow pretends to be a King, as Simon and A
throgenes did; if He says that Judea has a right
have a King other than Cæsar, He is guilty of treaso
and it is my solemn duty, as deputy of Tiberius,
ascertain the fact and have Him put to death."

The beginning of the interrogation of Jesus with
the palace is reported by all of the evangelists in t
same way. Addressing the prisoner, Pilate asked, "A
Thou the King of the Jews?" (Luke 23:3.) Jesus a
swered him, "Sayest thou this of thyself or did othe
tell it thee of me?"

This was a most natural and fitting response of t
Nazarene to the Roman. It was necessary first
understand the exact nature of the question before a
appropriate answer could be made. Jesus simp
wished to know whether the question was asked fro
a Roman or Jewish—from a temporal or spiritual
standpoint. If the interrogation was directed from
Roman—a temporal point of view—if Pilate was think
ing of legions and navies of a king like Cæsar, lordin
it over men by sheer military power, surrounded by
scheming and corrupt court—if that was what Pilat
had in mind—His answer would be an emphatic nega
tive. If, however, the inquiry had been prompted b
the Jews, it was then pregnant with religious meanin
and called for a different reply, one which would, a
once, repudiate all pretentions to such a kingship a
Cæsar's, and at the same time assert His claims to th
Messiahship and to that higher sovereignty which i
still in the future when the kingdoms of this worl

(shall) have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever.

But all of this was lost upon Pilate, who answered, "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the Chief Priests have delivered Thee unto me. What hast Thou done?"

To this Jesus replied, "My Kingdom is not of this world; if my Kingdom were of this world, then would my Servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now is my Kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36).

First He had answered negatively: "My Kingdom is not of this world." By this He meant that there was no possible rivalry between Him and Cæsar. But, in making this denial, He had used two words of grave import: "My Kingdom." Those two words struck the ear of Pilate with electric force, and in Pilate's reasoning, in the use of them Jesus stood self-convicted. For how, thought Pilate, can He pretend to have a kingdom unless He pretends to be a King? And then as if to cow and intimidate the prisoner; as if to avoid an unpleasant issue to the affair, he advanced threateningly upon the Christ and asked the question which the Bible puts into his mouth: "Art thou a King then?"

Rising from the simple dignity of a man to the beauty and glory and grandeur of God, Jesus used the most wonderful, beautiful, and meaningful words in the literature of the earth: *"Thou sayest that I am—a King! To this end I was born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bare witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice"* (John 18:37).

The effect of this statement of Christ's on Pilate is evident for he at once appeared before the Priests and declared, "I find no fault with him" (John 18:38). Thus Jesus was acquitted of the political charge, by the court having Him in custody. He ought to have been released and set free. The blood-thirsty Priests, however, would not permit this, and raised a frightful din before the palace, insisting upon His execution. "He has perverted women and children," they cried, "and systematically stirred up the whole nation from Galilee to Jerusalem. There is not a village or town in the land where He has not won converts and filled them with the wildest expectation. He has appealed to the nation to join His Kingdom."

The Priests were unfortunate in mentioning that Jesus was a Galilean. Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee, was in Jerusalem at the time!

Let us pause a moment here to consider this man Herod, before whom Jesus was now led for trial. The pages of sacred history mention the name of no more shallow and contemptible character than this petty princeling, this dissolute Idumean Sadducee. Compared with him, Judas is eminently respectable. Judas had a conscience, which, when smitten with remorse, drove him to suicide. It seems doubtful whether Herod had a spark of the celestial fire which we call conscience. He was a typical oriental prince, whose chief aim in life was the gratification of his passions. The worthlessness of his character was so pronounced that it excited a nauseating disgust in the mind of Jesus, and disturbed for a moment that serene and lofty magnanimity which characterized His whole life

and conduct. To Herod is addressed the only purely contemptuous epithet that the Master is recorded to have used. And He said unto them, "Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected" (Luke 13:32). Herod!—the son of a father who was ten times married, and had murdered many of his wives, the slave of a lewd, wicked woman; what better could be expected than a cruel, crafty, worthless character, whose attributes were those of a fox?

Herod Antipas had long desired to see Jesus, not because of any real desire to know Him, but simply as one might look forward to seeing a great magician or wonder-worker.

His interview with the Master, however, was disappointing. Jesus, in his presence, maintained an attitude of lofty reserve and of supreme contempt. Finally, tiring of his efforts to have sport out of the Man, and perhaps awed by His majestic mien, Herod orders Him returned to Pilate!

Herod was a crafty politician and entirely too shrewd to allow himself to become entangled in a trial fraught with such grave possibilities of trouble with the fanatical Jews. No doubt it was with an inward chuckle that he referred the whole tangled matter to his luckless contemporary and enemy, Pilate! One can well imagine Pilate's feeling of disappointment and chagrin at seeing the Jews returning with Jesus, to him! He had thought himself well rid of the awkward case.

A happy thought occurred to him, however. It was a custom of the Roman Procurator to release, dur-

ing the week of the Passover, one prisoner who might have been condemned to death. Pilate, accordingly, reminded the Jews of this custom and declared, "I will, therefore, chastise Him and release Him."

Why, O Pilate, art thou chastising the Man? If He is guilty of the charge brought against Him, chastisement is not sufficient punishment. If he is innocent, chastisement is unjust.

There can be only one answer to the question. Pilate in this way sought to compromise with the blood-thirsty Jews. And so Jesus is handed over to be scourged.

Scourging was a most terrific punishment. The Roman scourge was a whip—a handle about a foot long with seven long lashes of leather attached. At intervals of about two inches there were tied in the thongs sharp three-cornered bits of steel or bone or lead. The process of scourging was accomplished by stripping the victim to the waist, after which six soldiers took turns laying the terrific blows upon the bare back. So awful was the punishment that teeth and eyes were often knocked out and sometimes the very entrails of the prisoner were laid bare. That Jesus lived through this punishment is a testimony to His manhood and remarkable vitality.

In some pictures Christ is represented as an effeminate individual—pale-faced, thin and delicate. Such pictures are libels on the Manhood of the Master. He was a MAN! Strong, red-blooded, two-fisted, virile—not coarse, but rugged and square-shouldered! No one could walk twenty-five miles a day and more, as He frequently did, preaching as He went, healing the

sick, raising the dead and restoring sight to blind eyes, and be a weakling. Modern ministers are frequently exhausted after a Sabbath day of three services! What shall we say of Christ—the tireless preacher and teacher?

After the scourging was accomplished began a scene that will shame noble men and women as long as the world stands. Christ, trembling from the terrific punishment, is to be subjected to yet further indignities! "He is a King, is He!" cried some ruffian in the crowd. "Well, I'll make a King of Him," and reaching down into a pile of cast-off clothing near-by, he drew forth an old purple robe, dirty and moth-eaten—one of Pilate's cast-off garments, perhaps! Approaching Christ, he throws it around His shoulders! "He is a King, is He?" cried another, "Well, I'll make a King of Him," and he plucks an old broken reed from the roadside and places it in the trembling hand of the Master, while still another miserable fellow presses down upon that holy brow a crown of Palestinian thorns, stinging, needle-like, poisonous. There He stood—the Son of God. Humanity must hang its head as long as time lasts when it views this scene!

The priests, however, still cried out in sullen fury, saying, "Away with this man Jesus, crucify Him!" (John 19:6).

Pilate was now dismayed indeed. During the time that Jesus had been before Herod, Pilate had received a message from his wife, Claudia Procula, in which she had urged him to "have nothing to do with this just Man." Calling for a bowl of water, he washed his hands before the mob, declaring as he did so, "I am

innocent of the blood of this just Man." Why did he stand thus washing his hands when he should have been exercising them? O, Pilate! blood does not come off so easily. "His blood be upon us, and upon our children," responded the Jews! The scattered and despised Jewish nation is, today, an unwilling witness as to how effectively and entirely God took those Jews at their word! That was a goodly heritage that those Jews left their children, was it not? When Titus swept down upon Jerusalem with his Roman legions in the year 70 A. D., and there were so many Jews killed that there were not crosses enough for the bodies and not space enough for the crosses about the city, did the Jews then recall their words? "His blood be upon us, and upon our children," they cried, "for He has made Himself the Son of God" (John 19:7).

Something in those words smote the heart of Pilate. "Son of God!" "Son of God!" rang in his ears. He remembered Christ's calmness through all the turbulent scenes of the day, and he was troubled and worried, and called Christ in for another interview.

Stepping out from this final examination of Christ, Pilate again sought to release Him (John 19:12).

Christ had been three times acquitted. By all that stands for law and justice He should have been at once set free. Why was He not released?

The reason is found, I believe, in a careful study of Roman history, and of Pilate's part in that history.

Pilate presents here a most pathetic figure. Convinced of the innocence of Jesus, and cordially despising every Jew in the mob, from the most humble artisan to the broadest phylacteried Pharisee, he stood

helpless and pale in their power. Had he but dared he would have crushed them beneath his heel. All that survived in him that was fine and noble and honorable cried out against turning this innocent Man over to this mob of murderers. But he was in their power. He was gripped and bound by the sins of the past as by fetters of steel. He knew the right, but dared not do it. He was caught in a trap of his own making, and the crafty Jews knew it as well as he. While he still hesitated, they came nearer to him and one of them said, "If thou let this Man go, thou are not Cæsar's friend" (John 19:12). It was enough. Those words did the work! There is at this point a sudden change in his demeanor, for we read that he at once "gave Jesus over to be crucified." Why? What was the dark, sinister meaning of those words that they should so terrify the heart of Pilate?

Most writers who have dealt with this subject attribute Pilate's fear of, and his yielding to, this mob of blood-thirsty villains, to the fact that he was already in disfavor at the court of the emperor Tiberius, because of his high-handed policy in the Province he governed, and because of the many mistakes he had made in its government. That was certainly one of the reasons he feared and yielded. He had made grave mistakes in connection with the building of a great aqueduct for the construction of which he had sought to appropriate some of the temple money. He had enraged the Jews by placing upon the temple Roman standards which bore the image of the Emperor. But Pilate had dared to defy these Jews before! Why did he quake and tremble now?

The real reason is to be found, the writer believes, in a careful study of the history of this period of the Roman Empire.

Tiberius Cæsar was Emperor of Rome at this time. He was a morbid, moody, melancholy despot who lived a life of seclusion on the island Capri, in the Bay of Naples, leaving the active management of the affairs of the Empire to his Lieutenant Sejanus.

Now, this Sejanus was a scheming and ambitious individual, who, while professing great loyalty to the Emperor, had secretly organized a plot to kill him and seize the reins of government. Many of the Governors of the outlying Provinces, including Pilate and Herod Antipas, were, as we learn from history, involved in this plot against Tiberius. So carefully had the movement been organized by Sejanus, however, that none of the men involved knew just who the others in the plot were. But Herod Antipas, fox that he was, knowing that he himself was guilty of conspiracy against the Emperor, shrewdly and *correctly* suspected that Pilate, his personal enemy, was also involved. When he sent Jesus back to Pilate, therefore, he saw a splendid opportunity to humiliate him, and force him to an unpleasant task. We can see him now, craftily suggesting to Christ's accusers, if Pilate hesitated to obey their wishes and condemn the Man, that they *question* his *real* friendship for Cæsar! It was a master stroke of cunning and worked perfectly. Pilate, on the point of releasing Jesus, hears the sneering, insinuating words, "If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend," and, terrified to the heart, fearing that in some way his participation in the plot to murder the Em-

peror has become known, he immediately surrenders to the wishes of the mob! He dare not refuse to do their bidding. He is theirs—body and soul! He and Herod at once become friends (Luke 23:12). Of course they do, for each recognizes in the other a fellow conspirator! Thus Christ is handed over. Pilate ascends the judgment throne and tapping with the imperial gavel pronounces the words of doom upon the Christ —*"Ibis ad crucem. I, miles, expedi crucem."* The crucifixion is decreed and the sad scene which follows is familiar.

It is interesting to recall, while we are on this point, that Tiberius, through his network of spies throughout the empire, knew of the treachery of Sejanus all the while, and, after advancing him from honor to honor, killed him and a number of his associates in a most unique and savage way.

What a trial! In a few short hours Jesus was arrested, taken before the Sanhedrin, found guilty of blasphemy; then taken before Pilate, charged with treason and acquitted; then taken before Herod on the same charge and acquitted; then taken before Pilate on the same charge and again acquitted. Still the priesthood thirsted for His blood.

There is a fundamental rule of law, which says that no one shall be tried twice for the same offense. Jesus had been tried *four times*, once condemned, and three times acquitted. Then He was crucified, not for the crime of which He had been convicted, but for the crime of which He had been three times acquitted.

This was the trial of Jesus—the greatest monstrosity in the annals of legal history.

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